

To all those who will listen,

Good afternoon to each of you. My name is Shawn Sutherlin. I have recently become aware that many of you are on the eve of a momentous and powerful opportunity to influence real change in our state and in the lives of victims like myself. It is with this information that I would like to take a moment to share a voice as to why this is an important step in the right direction. On September 18th of this year I attended the sentencing of Gerald Sutter in a downtown Lansing courtroom to a meager audience of law enforcement and media. I awaited the moment that only a few had made to share their story in the form of a Victim's Impact Statement:

"My name is Shawn Sutherlin and I was a victim of Gerald Sutter. Nearly 25 years ago, I was identified, groomed, manipulated, isolated, and then sexually exploited for his own horrible ends. He saw a young boy without any parental oversight and sound guidance as a prime target for his personal satisfaction. This happened over the course of 2 years. I was taken advantage of sexually on numerous occasions during this time. I was gaslighted in the truest sense of the term, made to feel inferior, able to be discarded, and ultimately I was convinced, out of fear and embarrassment, that I was responsible for what was happening.

Jerry used my unfortunate emotional and financial situation of parental abandonment, to coerce and manipulate me into a secret relationship of control and abuse. These crimes have stolen my sense of self-worth and left me feeling broken. Living with the knowledge of what took place left a heavy burden of shame, guilt and countless sleepless nights, replaying these events in my mind, questioning what I could have done differently to avoid becoming a victim. The constant reminder imprinted in my brain and mindset has tainted my perspective, dominated my own view of personal value, and uniquely distorted future relationships with my inability to trust others, scarring me indefinitely. This terrible abuse led to my own self-abuse and triggered poor coping mechanisms with the use of drugs and alcohol, which I battled for many years after. By far the deepest impact has been the relentless self-induced guilt that I had somehow, in some way done something to deserve this! I DID NOT!

I refused for many years to believe I was a victim, rather that I was culpable. THIS is the profound and convoluted toll that predatory trauma of this nature can exact upon its victims.

You are a predator, and regrettably, due to our fractured legal system, you have not yet faced the full consequences you rightly deserve. I use the term 'yet' because I am committed to pursuing every possible avenue and leveraging all available resources to reform and amend the existing laws. My goal is to ensure that victims like myself can ultimately overcome the enduring absence of justice experienced within this haven our lawmakers have granted monsters like you!

Fear of judgment and persecution kept my mouth shut for too many years. However, when I found individuals that I could truly trust and confide in, I then began to heal. While the deep wounds have scars that have forever shaped my life, I am putting my foot down and closing that door today. I have learned that NO ONE person or event can dictate my value. My value began and remains in the hands of my creator and how He sees me. This is the truth!

I want to thank the Court and all of those in attendance for listening, and for the support that has been provided to the victims of this despicable human being. My only ask is that each of you takes this opportunity to reflect, to become open-minded and curious enough as to how you can assist in the

restoration of justice that continues to be missing for victims like myself and others here in this room, as well as those who are still unable to share their stories. Thank you.”

My motive in sharing this information is not to elicit pity or kind words of my courage, but to illuminate the void of justice that our state government has allowed for too long toward the victims of these types of crimes. Because of the statute of limitations, there has been an absolute truancy of duty to protect and uphold the rights of those who have fallen prey to the past evil acts of another. My silence and fear has now created a wall that blocks me from closure and reparation. The ridiculousness that victims, like myself, must now plead with lawmakers to seek improvements in obsolete regulations that prevent recourse is an insult. In a world that continues to promote an evolution of empowerment for the weak and touts a pride in providing strength to those neglected by wrongdoers, it seems unbelievable that these archaic laws still exist.

Unfortunately, I have come face to face with the reality that my horrible experience will not ever result in any personal justice in either a criminal or civil case due the perverse statues that have created incredible safety and shelter to these criminals who now have time truly on their side. This is the reality as well for so many others, not only within the Sutter case, but countless persons statewide that have been destroyed by predators just like him. My question is similar to the one within my statement. Do you want to perpetuate this indifference? Or will you take a stand to the mismanagement of our state and the disregard for those who have been objects of evil in the most depraved of ways that humans can harm one another? If you need a voice, I can be that. However, what I think is needed is a true reflection of the humanity of this situation. We are not being seen as victims worthy of justice. That is the reality that I believe should be impossible to avoid.

Thank you for taking the time to read my story and hopefully you have heard my heart.

Sincerely,

Shawn Sutherlin